(a) the number of villages connected to communication service by Government under the Telecom unication Expansion scheme; and

(b) the target set for the year 2007-08?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI DAYANIDHIMARAN): (a) As on 31st March, 2007, 5,61,346 villages in the country including 97,274 villages in Uttar Pradesh are connected to communication service through Village Public Telephone (VPT) facility.

(b) The target set for the year 2007-08 is given below:

(i) Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) has entered into an agreement with Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) in November, 2004 for provision of Village Public Telephones (VPTs) in remaining 66,822 unconnected villages in the country. This excludes villages having population less than 100, lying in thick forest areas/naxalite Infested areas etc. As on 31st March, 2007, out of 66,822 unconnected eligible villages, 46,969 villages have been provided with VPT facility and the remaining 19,853 villages will be provided with VPTs progressively by November, 2007. In respect of Uttar Pradesh, all the eligible villages have already been provided VPTs.

(ii) A scheme has been launched by the Government to provide support for setting up and managing 7871 number of infrastructures sites spread over 500 districts across 81 clusters in the country for provision of mobile services including other Wireless Access Services like Wireless in Local Loop (WLL) using Fixed/Mobile terminals in the specified rural and remote areas, where there is no existing fixed wireless or mobile coverage.

A total of 666 towers will be set up in specified rural and remote areas of Uttar Pradesh resulting in coverage of 34,767 villages in 66 districts of the State. The shared infrastructure facilities for mobile services is proposed to be set up in all such areas by June, 2008.

Growth in the economy

*355. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the focus of economic planning over next five years Would be on the ways and means to faster inclusive growth in the economy

(b) if so, the objective to bring a policy change that ensures a four per cent growth in agriculture is on the agenda;

(c) how the projected growth rate of four per cent in agriculture is expected to be achieved and what measures at the ground level encompassing rainfed and irrigated areas would be implemented;

(d) whether poultry, fisheries, horticulture, sericulture and animal husbandry would be given the allied sector status and whether all credit facilities, given to agriculture would be extended to the allied sectors; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING (SHRI M.V. RAJASEKHARAN): (a) to (c) The Approach Paper for the 11th Five Year Plan envisages restructuring of policies to achieve a new vision based on faster, more broad-based and inclusive growth in the economy as focus of economic planning over the next five years. Agriculture sector still provides livelihood to nearly 60 per cent of our people and remains vital for food security. To ensure a better life for women and men engaged in agriculture, it is necessary to double the growth rate achieved in 10th Plan and put agriculture on a growth path of around 4 per cent per annum. To do this and at the same time maintain prices and profitability, a corresponding increase in demand for agricultural output matched with the supply side response based on productivity improvements is required. The 11th Plan strategy to raise agricultural output, as reflected in the Approach Paper, emphasizes on the following elements:—

— Double the rate of growth of irrigated area;

— Improve water management, rain water harvesting and watershed development;

— Reclaim degraded land and focus on soil quality;

— Bridge the knowledge gap through effective extension;

— Diversify into high value outputs, fruits, vegetables, flowers, herbs and spices, medicinal plants, bamboo,87 bio-diesel etc., but with adequate measures to ensure food security;

— Promote animal husbandry and fishery;

— Provide easy access to credit at affordable rates;

— Improve the incentive structure and functioning of markets;

— Refocus on land reforms issues;

— Energize the National Agricultural Research System and improve its capacity to develop and deliver innovative and effective technologies relevant to the current contexts and needs.

(d) to (e) Poultry, fisheries, sericulture and animal husbandry have been classified under allied sector and horticulture under Primary Sector. There has been steady increase in credit to agriculture, including its allied sectors, in recent years. Since the announcement of 'Farm Credit Package' in June 2004, stipulating doubling of the flow of institutional credit for agriculture in the ensuing three years, the overal agricultural lending by all agencies *(i.e.* Commercial Banks, Regional Rural Banks and Co-operative Banks) has increased from Rs. 86,981 crore in 2003-04 to Rs. 1,80,486 crore in 2005-06.

Unemployment in urban areas

*356. SHRI MAHENDRA MOHAN: Will the Minister of HOUSING AND URBAN POVERTY ALLEVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that unemployment in urban India has risen sharply, according to the five-yearly surveys of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO);

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the incidence of joblessness has gone up rather disturbingly in smalI towns when compared to medium-sized towns and cities over this period;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) what steps Government have taken in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND URBAN POVERTY ALLEVIATION (KUMARISELJA): (a) to (d) The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) has released the Report No. 520 on "Employment and Unemployment situation in Cities and Towns in India 2004-2005", on the basis of data of the seventh quinquennial survey of